

A RECORD OF A CROWNED SNAKE, *ELAPOGNATHUS CORONATUS* ON THE DARLING RANGE, PERTH, WESTERN AUSTRALIA

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Even the local distributions of some reptiles in the Perth region are uncertain with several new records of species recorded for the first time south of the Swan River, that include *Lucasium alboguttatum* (Turpin 1990), *Delma concinna concinna* (Thompson and Thompson 2007) and *Lerista lineopunctulata* (Davis and Bamford 2005). Generally in the Perth region some reptile species only inhabit either the Swan Coastal Plain or the Darling Range, while many occur in both (Bush *et al.* 2010). However, some species can be recorded for the first time in a habitat they are not generally associated with, for example *Ramphotyphlops pinguis* on the Swan Coastal Plain (Algaba 2005).

The endemic Western Australian venomous land snake *Elapognathus coronatus* (Schlegel 1837) is one of 15 species of elapid snake recorded from the Perth region, which is the northern limit of its distribution. Being at the end of its range it is consequently scarce (Storr *et al.* 1978; Bush *et al.* 2010). It is however more abundant

south of the Perth region and especially on the south coast (pers. obs.). This species is generally associated with coastal plains (Storr *et al.* 2002) or coastal woodlands, heaths and swamps (Wilson and Swan 2008), which is reflected by the Western Australian Museum records in the Perth region that include specimens post 1970 from Riverton (R39781), Jandakot (R47649), Rossmoyne (R60877), Muchea (R96240) and Perth Airport (R119467). All of our limited number of observations of this species in the Perth region thus far have been from the Swan Coastal Plain south of the Swan River and to our knowledge we are not aware of any records from the elevated lateritic plateau of the Darling Range.

On 18 September 2010 at 11.15 am, one of us (DA) raked (using a three-pronged cultivator) from *Xanthorrhoea* debris a juvenile *E. coronatus* (Figure 1) on Leona Road at 32°14'12"S 116°19'27"E, approximately 13 kilometres south of Mount Dale. The vegetation at the collection site consisted



Figure 1. Juvenile Crowned Snake recorded on the Darling Range.

of a mixed Jarrah/Wandoo woodland at the base of a low lateritic rise and adjacent to a low-lying *Melaleuca preissiana* shrubland with *Xanthorrhoea*. The low-lying area with Paperbark and Grass trees would become seasonally inundated following sufficient rains and provide a suitable breeding location for small frogs (e.g. *Crinia* spp.) which are, along with small skinks, the preferred prey of *E. coronatus*. In this regard, the habitat is very similar to those ephemeral swamps on the Swan Coastal Plain where we have observed *E. coronatus*.

Owing to the obvious identification of the snake (the broad black bar across the nape is easily diagnosable in this species) and the previous resolution of this species' molecular phylogeny (Keogh *et*

al. 2000), it was photographed and released after capture. This is in keeping with our belief that a museum specimen of easily identifiable species is not necessary. In our opinion, a clear photographic record that can be stored on an observations database is all that is required and should be mandatory for records of those larger, long-lived reptiles.

The collection of *E. coronatus* on the Darling Range represents an interesting distributional record and highlights the paucity of fauna surveys in the region. It also underlines that there are significant gaps in even the most basic information on the distribution of herpetofauna inhabiting southwestern Western Australia, ironically the most intensely developed part of this

state while being recognised globally as a 'biodiversity hotspot'.

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